

Silence

Listening Car Rides

Silence. Sweet, sweet silence. Many parents long for the elusive silence. Oh, to experience freedom from noisy games, chatter, and bickering! Silence, more than just a time to enjoy the absence of chaos, is a powerful tool for connecting with God. So often we speak of prayer as a time to talk to God, but if prayer is truly a conversation, we must make time to listen, too. This practice takes advantage of car rides.

In the Introduction, I spoke a bit about the need for spiritual practices to never be punitive. This is particularly important for this practice. The goal is for children, over time, to associate quiet with a sense of listening to God and peace. If parents enter in to “Listening Car Rides” in a flurry of anger, saying, “I said QUIET!” children may associate quiet with tension or punishment and come to resent it. If it is treated as something mysterious and spiritual, children may come to appreciate and embrace it.

Designed for Ages 5+

(Length of time should be adjusted according to age)

Materials: None

Time Investment: Varies

How To

1. Choose to do a Listening Car Ride at a time when the family is not rushing out the door. Allow an extra five minutes to explain the activity and dawdle on the way to the car. It is important for everyone to be in a peaceful state of mind before beginning.

2. Before leaving, gather everyone together and explain in a very quiet voice, almost a whisper: *“This is a Listening Car Ride. That means we are going to listen to hear if God has anything to say to us in the silence of our car ride. We won’t talk to anyone in the car—unless there is an emergency—from the time I say ‘Amen’ until we get to our destination and I say ‘Amen’ again.”*

3. When everyone is settled in the car, say, *“Now we will try our Listening Car Ride. We will be silent to see if God has something to say to us. We might not hear anything, and that’s okay; it’s important for us to be 100 percent silent and quiet from the time I say ‘Amen.’ Ready? Here we go.”* Then pray, *“God, we thank you for this quiet car ride. Help us to listen closely to you while we are in the car. Amen.”*

4. Drive to your destination in silence. When you arrive, say, *“God, thank you for allowing us the opportunity to listen for your voice. Amen.”*

Notes

- Start very slowly with this one; a 1–3 minute car ride is more than enough time for the first ride. Praise children for their good work on this. It’s hard to be quiet! Gradually increase the time of silence and listening. Remember, this activity will be more challenging for some children than others.
- When children test this activity by speaking, making noise, etc., gently get everyone on track by saying, *“Remember...quiet listening time, please!”* If the activity unravels, abandon it for another time. (See “What should I do when something goes wrong?” in the “Frequently Asked Questions” section.)

Variations

- Instead of total silence, try this with quiet (and wordless) music playing.
- Add a time of discussion afterward:
- *“How did you feel about listening time? Did you hear God say anything to you?”*
- For children who enjoy silence and listening, consider adding a journal that they can use to write or draw what they have heard God say during this time.
- Try this activity at home with a timer rather than in the car.